

LONDON SUNDAY TIMES
29 March 1981

At the end of an extraordinary week of allegations about security service, Mrs Thatcher officially cleared the former MI5, Sir Roger Hollis, of working for the KGB. But two questions remain: who leaked the suggestion in the first place? Lay behind the accusations that the top level of MI5 had never been penetrated by Moscow? Answers to both can now be

How the seeds of suspicion were sown

IP, MRS. THATCHER genuinely intends to trace the source of last week's security leaks, she must venture back into one of the most bizarre periods of modern British politics—the Harold Wilson government between 1964 and 1976. It was here, in an atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue at Number 10 Downing Street, that doubts about the reliability of MI5 were first voiced by Wilson himself, and by his political secretary Lady Falkender.

Within weeks of his resignation as Prime Minister, in March, 1976, Wilson sought means of making public those anxieties, and in a series of oblique approaches he began suggesting to various newspapers that there was something rotten in the state of Britain's security services which should be investigated. He put out feelers to the editors of The Guardian and The Observer, but in so elusive a manner that neither appeared to understand that he was offering to help in pursuing an enquiry.

He then approached the BBC and began an extraordinary series of interviews with two reporters, Barrie Penrose and Roger Courtour. By talking to them, and confirming what he had said to the BBC's Director-General, Sir Charles Curran, Wilson was dismantling the hallowed convention that a prime minister never discusses with outsiders the innermost secrets of the state.

In the course of those talks first Wilson, then a great deal more detail—Lady Falkender made a series of devastating allegations about security matters. When some of these first surfaced, in

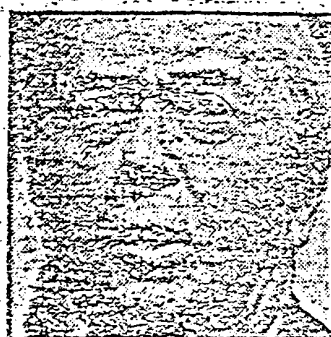
by Barrie Penrose,
Colin Simpson
and Simon Freeman

with suspicion and, often, open disbelief. But events have served to confirm many of them.

Lady Falkender told Penrose and Courtour in March, 1977, that there was a faction within MI5 which was convinced that the former head of that service was working for the KGB. "Harold told me, 'I've heard everything now. I've just been told that the head of MI5 may have defected to the Russians,'" she said. Last week the Hollis affair broke into the open.

She talked in July, 1977, about the "fourth man" in the Philby affair, and mentioned "the keeper of the Queen's pictures." In 1979 Anthony Blunt, who once held that job, was revealed as a KGB agent.

She disclosed in March, 1977, that a former British ambassador in Moscow had been compromised by the KGB. "He was not a defector. But he was absolutely ensnared in a KGB plot," she said. "He had been in bed many times with someone he thought was the maid, but who wasn't." Earlier this year, The Sunday Times named that ambassador as Sir Geoffrey Harrison.



Wilson: "I see myself as the big fat spider."

In July, 1977, she told the story about plans for a military coup discussed in 1966 by Lord Mountbatten and others. "Harold was told during the week after his resignation announcement [in March, 1976]," she said. "Solly (Zuckerman) volunteered the whole background to the coup." On page 2 The Sunday Times discloses how far those coup discussions went.

It is clear that the "Hollis affair" owes its origins to these conversations. Penrose and Courtour reported the suspicions about a former head of MI5 in their book The Pincourt File. Although they had established that the suspected chief was Hollis—and had talked to Hollis's widow—they decided that the evidence was not strong enough to justify using the name. And it is significant that Wilson himself said at the time that Hollis might have been deliberately smeared by a hostile faction within MI5. "He has got doubts," said Lady Falkender. "He wasn't sure whether that particular individual might have been moderate and friendly and reliable, and the others had wanted him marked. Harold thought

10. At a luncheon in 1975, the Oxford historian Martin Gilbert, official biographer to Sir Winston Churchill, took notes as a retired senior figure in the Ministry of Defence discussed whether Lady Falkender really had "security clearance" (she did). Also present was Chapman Pincher and a man with supposed MI5 links. Gilbert, who was deeply concerned at the conversation, passed his notes on it to Wilson.

And at a London dinner party some months later, officials with MI5 connections openly discussed the "fact" that Wilson and Lady Falkender had communist links. Again Wilson learned of the discussion.

Wilson's basic concern was that British Intelligence—or a section of it—had been quoted by reliable witnesses as being the actual source for such rumours. His first action was to call in the late Sir Maurice Oldfield, then head of MI6, and

Before he went on holiday to the Scillies, in August, 1975, Wilson learned from the MI6 chief that a group of security service officials was vehemently anti-Labour and anti-Wilson.

Shortly afterwards, according to Wilson, the head of MI5, Sir Michael Hanley, confirmed that within his service was a disaffected faction with extreme right-wing views. Wilson and Lady Falkender posed the question: if he could not trust a section of MI5, how could he ask them to investigate impartially the rumours which were being made about himself and his entourage at Number 10? No longer fully trusting the information he was getting from the security services, Wilson made an unprecedented move for a